

GURU PANTH

(Collective Leadership)

By

Nanak Singh Nishter

M.A.

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By the grace of All Pervading
One True Lord.



The Punjabi word Panth is derived in Hindi from the Sanskrit word Path, which means in English a path i.e., a way for foot-passengers. This word denotes the same meaning in all the four languages. But unfortunately it is misunderstood as religion. Basically the word religion comes from Latin word relegere, which indicates a system of worship and attributed to the Semitic Religions in English language. Thus the word religion is not a proper substitute for Panth or Dharama, which covers the whole way of life and not confined to the worship alone.

Coming to the Sikh Panth, it condemns all barriers of religion and unites the entire mankind under one umbrella without distinction of Dharama, religion, castes, Varana Asharmas, gender and birth. Thus any of the condemned compartments if attributed to

its existence is misconceived and misleading. It took a period of 239 years for the formation of Sikh Panth from Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539) to Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1669-1708). The Ten Gurus lived, preached and practised the doctrines of Sikh way of life in its complete form as a model for their followers.

I will confine my paper in searching a solution of leadership from our Panthic Philosophy and traditions. Panthic leadership was vested in the personality of individual Gurus, till the 10th Guru Sahib. Shri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib Ji had jointly transformed the Guruship in the form of holy scripture of Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and collective leadership in the form of Panj Piarae. This being the most forgotten and misinterpreted subject, I would like to avail of this opportunity and concentrate on this backbone of the Sikh psyche, which is so badly damaged that we have

lost the effective and impressive facet of our personality.

In the recent years, instead of putting in practice and operating the institution of Panj Piarae in its true spirit, we are gradually fracturing this noble institution. We have confined the concept of the word as a historic past or a mark of religious symbol, whereas it has been focused and established as an institution by Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji on Baisakhi of 1699. To sanction the supremacy of collective leadership of the followers over the founder himself is a unique characteristic seen in no other religion in the world.

The 10th Guru Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji was born in 1666 and attained Guruship in 1675. In his short life span of 42 years, he had to fight 17 battles. In 1686 he won his first battle at Bhangani against Hindu Hill Rajas led by Bhim Chand of Bilaspur. In 1687 he won his second battle at Nadaun against the Mughal

forces. He was foreseeing the militant oppressions from both Hindu and Muslim rulers. he had also foreseen the difficulties of the Sikh Guruship conferred on an individual, a practice at that time. When the task initiated by the 1st Guru Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji was completed, he planned for conferring the Guruship on to the collective leadership of the community. For this purpose, he had to prepare and test his followers and fix a parameter to become his rightful successor in every respect, so that they should be capable to lead the community for the generations to come.

On the morning of Baisakhi of 1699, he asked for the five heads of his devotees for the protection of Dharama from all the four corners of the country to give it a "National Representation". This can not be a coincidence that, one from east Puri (Orisa), one from west Dwarka (Gujrat), two from north Lahore (Punjab) and Hastana Pur (present Delhi) and one from south Bidar (Karnataka), have offered

their heads one after the another. They were named after the qualities required for, as Daya (mercy) Singh, Dharam (righteousness) Singh, Himmat (courage) Singh, Mohkam (consistency) Singh and Sahib (master) Singh. The qualities essential for a Khalsa also can not be a co-incidence. It seems, these facts have been deliberately distorted which could focus the glorious philosophy and basics of the Khalsa. They were given the title of Panj Piyare i.e., Five Beloveds. This he had criteria for admission in the order of the Khalsa i.e., the final shape of the Sikhs. He baptised them in a particular Sikh way i.e., Amrit, by reciting holy hymns and stirring the water in a steel bowl with a double edged steel sword called Khanda. He asked his wife Mata Ajito Ji, popularly known as Mata Jito Ji (after taking Amrit called Mata Ajit Kaur Ji), to put sugar puffs (batase) into it, associating her in the new transformation. While sprinkling the Amrit on their face, he asked them to repeat "Wahguru Ji Ka Khalsa - Wahguru Ji Ki Fateh".

This was to penetrate in their mind that they no more belonged to any Guru alone, but the Khalsa belong to the Wonderful Lord i.e., Wahguru and the victory is of the Wonderful Lord i.e, Wahguru. He asked them to drink the Amrit one by one by turn and reverse the turn in the same bowl to create the spirit of oneness. Thus he had abolished caste, custom, rituals, beliefs, differences and superstitions and banded them in one single brotherhood. No one will be superior or inferior to another. He had then made the modern concept of Universal Humanism the religion of Khalsa.

It is a universal practice to disarm the defeated person. And the slaves are never permitted to hold any weapon. The foresighted Guru Sahib had made his Sikhs to compulsorily arm with Kirpan i.e., sword as a part of the new religious order so as to live like a victorious person. This has helped Khalsa to be the only sovereign person on this earth, who is entitled to carry Kirpan everywhere, inspite of today's

strict security restrictions.

The word Khalsa is Arabic in origin, which means pure and another meaning is a part of land, which is not under any person but fall under the direct control the emperor. Although the concept of Khalsa Panth was institutionlised by Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, but the term had been in usage in the Sikh traditions even earlier. Bhagat kabir Ji on page No. 654 of Shri Guru Granth Sahib calls the emancipated persons as Khalsa i.e., God's own or directly linked with the Supreme Reality.

*Paryo kaal, sabhai jag ooper,
mah likhe barham giani.
Kaho kabir, jan bhaye Khalse,
prem bhagat jeh jaani.*

The Hukamnama issued by the 6th Guru Shri Guru Hargobind Ji, refers to the Sangats of East as Guru's Khalsa. Similarly,

another Hukamnama issued by the 9th Guru Shri Guru Tegh Bahadar ji, calls the Sangat of Pattan (Pak Pattan) as Guru's Khalsa. Then, the 10th Guru Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji also refers to his Sikhs, in one of his Hukamnama, written just nineteen days prior to the creation of the Khalsa Panth in 1699.

The creation of Khalsa was the culmination of Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's genius, and the written character of his word. The Amrit completely transmuted the men drawn from the low to the high castes, and amongst the Hindus and the Muslims, for making Universal Nation of men, apart from the characteristics that delimited races and nations.

The final form of the Sikh as described by Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji was completed. He said, "If you want to play the game of love, step on to my path with your head on the palm of your hand. Once you set your feet on

my path, do not hesitate to lay down your head."

*Jav tav, prem khelan ka chao,
sir dhar talli, gali meri aavo.*

*lth marg, paiyer dharijai,
sir deejai, kaan na keejai.*

(Shri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1412)

Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji had the great task before him to prepare this Amritdhari Khalsa to succeed him for Guruship. Still he had to imbibe in them the qualities of super beings to lead the community. They were yet to be trained to courageously shoulder the responsibilities of Guruship.

By this time Guru Sahib had already the institution of Masand. They were initially appointed as Guru's representatives from the period of the 4th Guru Shri Guru Ram Das Ji. They were deputed the job for selfless devotion for the promotion of Sikhism. But most of them

became degenerate, corrupt and were misappropriating the offerings made for the Guru by the Sangat.' Some were behaving like the Guru and even declared themselves to be one. At this stage, he had also realised that the Sikh movement required a collective leadership and wisdom at all levels, leaving no room for any individual to mislead and mismanage the affairs. The proverb was proved to be correct that the "power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely".

Till that time only monarchical governments were functioning throughout the world. Even till today, most of the religious, social and political (so-called democratic) outfits are under single person's umbrella. This is the foresight of Guru Sahib that has given a novel idea of transforming the powers of a Central Body into a Local Self Body, by way of delegating the Guruship on the Panj Piarae. Here, we mistakenly understand as Guruship was bestowed on the Sikh Sangat

(congregation). No, not at all, Guruship was vested only to the chosen Panj Piarae, but not to the mob gathered on Baiskhi in thousands of number. This was the unique transfer of power that the world ever experienced before, nor experienced hereafter. This pioneered even the political philosophy of the world to follow it in this modern and advanced civilisation as most suitable form of governing affairs by the new concept of democracy.

Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji was a pioneer and champion of public opinion and democracy. The ideas of Karl Marx, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire are subjects of much praise these days. They have presented mankind with a sound idea, the power of the commons is the highest authority. But Guru Sahib was the first, foremost and the actual originator of the ideal of democracy. He was born twenty-eight years before Voltaire (born in 1694), forty-two years before

Rousseau (born in 1712), and one hundred and fifty two years before Marx (born in 1818).

The significance of the Baisakhi of 1699 is not only that the Guru Sahib has given a complete shape to his disciples in a peculiar way by giving Amrit. The most important aspect of this unparalleled event is that the Panj Piarae has been bestowed the Guruship of super power which has the sovereignty to admit Shri Guru Gobind Rai in the folds of Khalsa, conferring him the title of Singh, hereafter called Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. These Panj Piarae had prepared and administered the Amrit in the same way as Guru Sahib did it and made him to repeat "Wahguru ji Ka Khalsa Wahguru Ji Ki Fateh". Thus the Guru Sahib had not only assimilated himself into the Khalsa, but had empowered and bestowed on them the Guruship for all practical purposes and he himself became the disciple of the Guru Path Khalsa represented by the Panj Piarae.

This has been done in consonance with the Sikh traditions. Bhai Gurdas Ji has beautifully described this practice among the Sikhs stating :-

*Kali kaal, pargas kar,
Gur chela, chela Gur sanda.*

(Var 40-Paodi 11)

The darkness of Kaliyuga is dispelled by the light of disciple becoming the Guru and the Guru becoming the disciple. At another place, he said :-

*Ik Sikh, doye sadh sang,
punjeen parmashar.*

(Var 13-Paodi 19)

A single Sikh is a Sikh person. Two Sikhs are Sadh Sangat i.e., holy congregation. And among the five Sikhs the almighty God is present. This indicates, how a group of five

Sikhs has been accorded the highest position and the individual is after all an individual person only, how ever high he may be. Thus the Guruship to the five Sikhs instead of one is vested collectively, so that the flame of Guruship should continue to burn eternally.

The concept of Guru in religious traditions is a person who has deeply experienced the God and shares it with others. In other words they are God's spokesman and communicators of divine truth. This part of Guruship had been conferred on Shri Guru Granth Sahib in 1708. But the incarnation of Guruship for interaction and physical guidance was bestowed on the Guru Panth through the Panj Piarae in 1699 itself, for Godly and worldly affairs. In 1705 though unwilling to trust and accept the offer made by the Mughal and Hindu Hill Rajahs' combined forces for safe evacuation of Anandpur Sahib, he has yielded for strenghtening his belief in the Guruship of the Panj Piarae. In his popular and famous

shabad “ Deh Shiva bar moh ih”, he had expressed his earnest desire for death while fighting at the battle field. The golden opportunity came for him, when he along with 40 Sikhs, was trapped in the mud fortress of Choudhry Budhi Chand at Chamkor. He turned down the request of the Sikhs to safely escape from the siege. But the Sikhs cleverly used their authority as the Guru in the form of Panj Piarae, and dictated him to make good his escape, leaving no option for him, except to obey the orders, to which he humbly complied.

In 1707 while going south he happened to pass by the Dera of Dadu Ram Bairagi. Here, he lowered his arrow in salutations before the tomb, in contravention of prohibition of grave worship, an act that he had done to test the courage of his Sikhs. Here the Sikhs had proved themselves to be capable of becoming true successor by pronouncing Guru Sahib guilty and fined him Rs. 125/-. All these and many more glaring examples of the fact that

what he preached, he also practised in life, and what he had said in his poetry was not just of only literary value. He had set value-based traditions to be followed by his followers. This has been incorporated in the Sikh Rehat Maryada i.e., The Code of Sikh Conduct and Conventions, for implementation in the regular religious practices as follows.

In Ardas, we remember Panj Piarae immediately after the names of Wonderful Lord and Gurus. Before the distribution of Kadah Prashad to the Sangat, it is given to five Amritdhari Khalsa pronouncing the names of Panj Piarae. Then the share of the person in attendance of Shri Guru Granth Sahib is kept in a small bowl. After this only, the Kadah Prashad is distributed among the Sangat. This shows the mark of respect and preference for the institution of Panj Piarae as successor of the Guru Sahib in daily practice.

For imposing Tankhah i.e., (religious

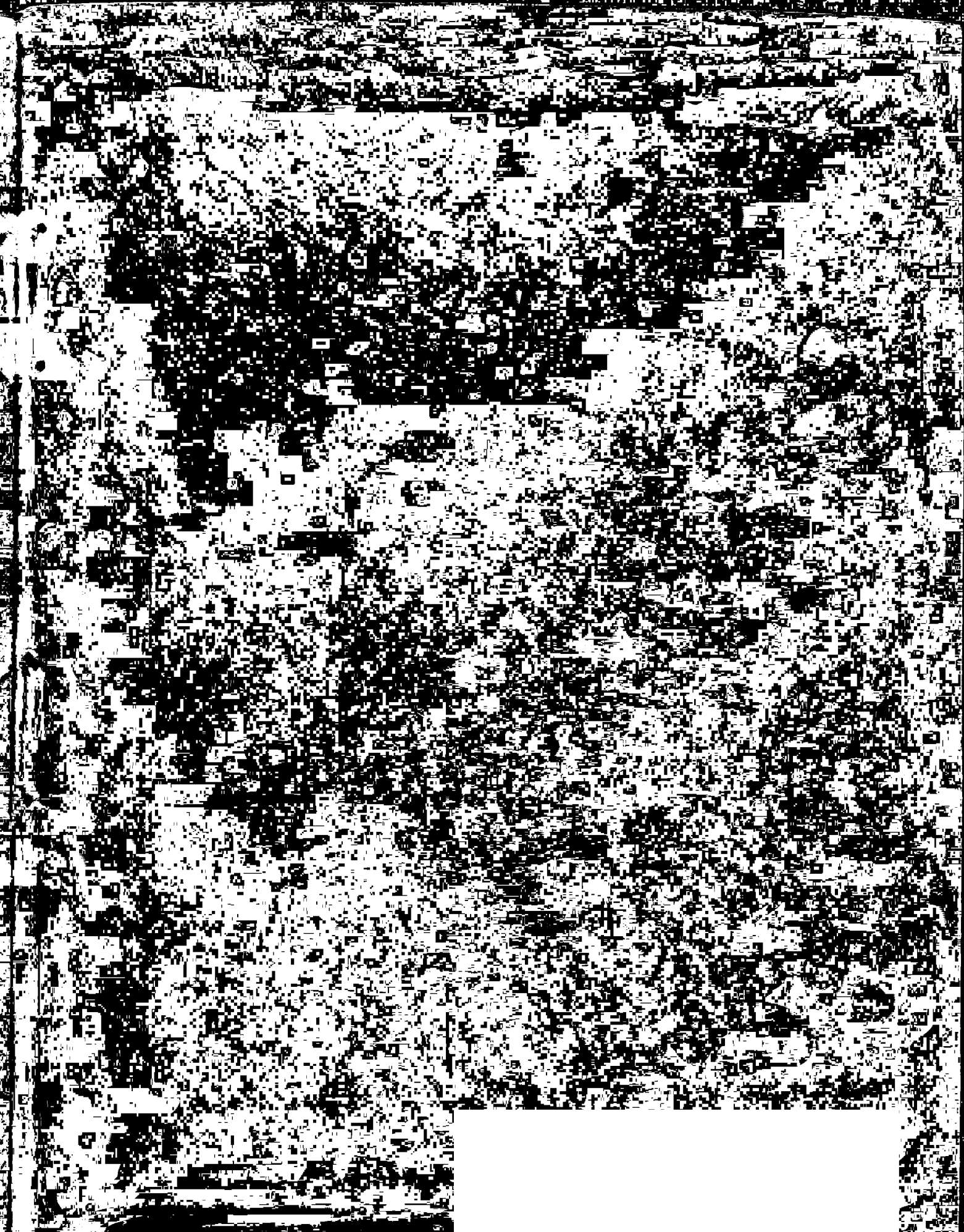
punishment), for breach of any religious practices, the Sangat (congregation) in the holy presence of Shri Guru Granth Sahib choose from among them Panj Piarae. Who in the capacity as Guru, listen the aggrieved and accused both sides and award their judgement, which is termed as "Gurmatta" i.e., opinion of the Guru. To pass any resolution by the Jaikara (war cry) Bole So Nihal - Sat Sri Akal, is the mob culture of political degeneration of the society, where as in Gurmat philosophy there is no scope for exhibiting such men, money and muscle power to resolve the issues. The Gurmat philosophy sanctions the authority of Panj Piarae i.e., five Amritdhari person of calibre to be chosen from among the Sangat, and the mob are supposed to follow and not to dictate.

The life and teachings of all the Gurus had given the top priority to people's authority and public opinion. The public opinion was their deciding power in religion, society and battles.

Not as a ideal merely, but it was given rightful place both in practice and in daily personal and common use. The teachers, Saints and prophets have declared that they have made their followers, what they were. But Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji has significantly admitted that it was the Sikhs who had made him, what ever he was. It was not only said in theory, but has become a regular feature of the Sikh faith.

It is a wrong notion to declare that the physical Guruship has ended with the 10th Guru Sahib. Whereas the individual Guruship is no doubt ended with the 10th Guru Sahib, but the collective Guruship vested in the Panj Piarae of the Guru Panth Khalsa has continued till today and will last forever. I would like to avail this opportunity and make an appeal to all Sikh institutions specially Gurudwaras to take a lead to revive the fading status of Panj Piarae. As a first step to follow and propagate the Reht Maryada. To restore the dignity of Amritdhari Khalsa .

and the importance of the institution of Panj Piyrae, distribute the Kadah Prashad of Panj Piarae in the Sangat, which has almost disappeared. Subsequently other steps should be taken to take the guidance from the collective leadership of the cream of the Panth in the form of Panj Piarae, as they are the incarnation of Guru himself, and to revive the dignity of this pioneer institution of collective leadership of the Guru Panth.



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" Sant Bhavan "

15-3-137, Gowliguda Chaman,
Hyderabad - 500 012.

Ph: 040-4615321 / 4605520

Fax: 040-7816026

E-mail: nanaknishter@hotmail.com